

Washington, DC—Congressman Ciro D. Rodriguez (TX-23), a member of the House Veterans Affairs (VA) Committee today supported HR 1527, a bill he cosponsored that passed the full VA Committee and would direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) to conduct a pilot program to permit highly rural veterans enrolled in the VA health system to receive covered health services through providers other than those of the VA.

“Granting our rural veterans better, easier access to health care is a common sense solution to a problem too many of our veterans face,” said Rodriguez. “This program should help pave the way for all of our rural veterans to receive the care we promised them when they served our country.”

The bill would specifically require the Secretary to conduct the pilot program in four Veteran Integrated Services Networks of 1, 15, 18 and 19. The 18th network includes the counties Brewster, Culberson, El Paso, Hudspeth, Jeff Davis, Pecos, Presidio, and Reeves in Rodriguez’s Congressional district. The 18th

network also includes several other Texas counties and all of New Mexico and Arizona.

The program would allow a highly rural veteran who is in the VA system of patient enrollment to elect to receive covered health services through a non-VA health care provider. The types of providers allowed would be determined before the program would be implemented.

The bill also defines a “highly rural veteran” as one who resides more than 60 miles from the nearest VA facility providing primary care services, more than 120 miles from a VA facility providing acute hospital care, or more than 240 miles from a VA facility providing tertiary care depending on which services the veteran needs or otherwise experiences such hardships or other difficulties in travel to the nearest appropriate VA facility that such travel is not in the best interest of the veteran.

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